

Step by Step Guide to Obtaining Permits and Licenses Required to Hold a Special Event



City of Cambridge

A Word from Robert W. Healy *Cambridge City Manager*

The City of Cambridge is dedicated to maintaining its competitiveness and desirability as *the* place to live, work, and do business. Cambridge's continual growth and development depend, in part, upon the quality and timeliness of the information and services delivered by the City. This pamphlet has been prepared to assist residents, businesses, and developers in moving through the City's regulatory processes as easily as possible, by removing unnecessary confusion, delays, and costs. This pamphlet is one in a series, and is part of the City's ongoing effort to sustain livable neighborhoods and a positive business climate.



Robert W. Healy,
City Manager

This brochure explains the steps in obtaining the necessary permits and licenses to hold a special event in the City of Cambridge. Please read this entire brochure before initiating the process.

This brochure addresses the permitting process for complex events only. Applicants wishing to hold a simple block party may only need to obtain a street closing permit from the Traffic, Parking & Transportation Department if the event does not involve selling food, alcohol, raffle tickets or other goods; the installation of stages and stands; a parade, carnival rides and games; additional electrical hook-ups; or police details.

What type of special events require permits and licenses from the City?

Parades, festivals, fairs, carnivals, or other large events require special events related permits and licenses.

Are special events regulated by law?

Yes, both the City and the State regulate special events permits. Carnivals or festivals are regulated by M.G.L. c. 140, §181, an alcohol license is required by M.G.L. c. 138, § 14 and City regulation, and an entertainment license is required by M.G.L. c.140, §183 and City regulation.

How far in advance of the event date should the City be contacted?

Applicants should initiate the permit process no later than two months before the anticipated event date. If an event is being held for the first time in the City and the applicant is unfamiliar with City regulations, a longer preparation time may be needed.

What steps should be followed in seeking a special events permit?

The following instructions apply to events held on public property.

1. EVENT PLAN. Prior to meeting with any City representatives, the applicant is advised to develop an event plan which addresses the following items:

Date - Propose several event dates, including rain dates, to ensure a date does not conflict with other possible events.

Duration - Provide the proposed hours which is crucial in planning for police details, clean up, and resumption of normal traffic flow. Include time for set-up, clean-up, and trash removal.

Size - Estimate the number of participants to determine the required number of police details. If the special event is a parade, estimate the number of participating groups and the dimensions of vehicles. This information is used by the City to maintain public safety and clear road passageways. If applicable, provide an estimate of the number of vendors and the number and type of amusement rides and games. These uses may involve different electrical hook-ups and propane gas requirements.

Location - Information to be provided to the City may vary depending on where the event is to occur.

- If held on city streets, provide a proposed location, including a list of requested street closures and parking restrictions.
- If the event is a parade, provide the starting point, proposed route, and final destination. Indicate the assembly area and location of stages and stands.

- If held in a city park, select the most suitable park and outline the boundaries of the event within the park.
- PLEASE NOTE: Special events are not allowed in the Cambridge Common, restricted areas in Harvard Square, and Sennott Park. Contact the Metropolitan District Commission directly for instruction regarding events on its property, including River Bend Park and the open space along Memorial Drive.

2. LETTER OF INTENT. Compile all information above in a letter of intent and send it to the City Manager's office. A representative from the Department of Public Works will contact the applicant to schedule a meeting with the City's Special Events Committee.

3. PRESENTATION TO THE CITY'S SPECIAL EVENTS COMMITTEE. The applicant will be asked to present the proposed event plan to representatives from a number of City departments. The City department representatives will identify needs for City services and advise on compliance with public regulations. Each department will have available copies of permit and license applications. Applicants should be advised that the City charges fees for the required permits and licenses, and that many of the City services involve charges to the applicant for costs incurred by the City. The major requirements are discussed below.

Public Works Department

Staging and/or Review Stands - The Department of Public Works (DPW) can provide a variety of stages. DPW will also assemble or disassemble the stage. There is a charge for this service.

Trash & Clean Up - DPW sets up and picks up the trash/recycling receptacles. To avoid hazardous accumulation, trash receptacles must be placed five feet away from all building openings. The cost for this service is borne by the applicant and can be kept down by coordinating clean up with event volunteers.

Permits - DPW issues park and public areas permits and sidewalk obstruction permits. DPW will advise the applicant if either of the permits are required.

Traffic, Parking and Transportation

Coordination with the MBTA - The event may interrupt regular bus service. The Department of Traffic, Parking and Transportation (TPT) will notify the MBTA and coordinate any needed changes.

Street Closures - TPT reviews the request for street closure. Detour plans, if necessary, are established with the Police Department and set up as required. The costs associated with street closures are borne by the applicant.

Permits - TPT will advise the applicant if a street obstruction or a street closing permit is needed as part of the special event and will provide the relevant application form.

License Commission

Licenses - The License Commission issues one-day entertainment licenses, one-day peddler/vendor licenses, carnival/festival licenses, one-day liquor licenses, and raffle/bazaar licenses.

Entertainment and vendor licenses are issued after a review or hearing process by the License Commission and a sign-off from the Police Department. Hearings are required if an organization has not upheld its duties and responsibilities at past events. If a hearing is necessary, it will take approximately 4 to 6 weeks to process and issue this license.

For a carnival/festival license, the applicant must (a) obtain a sign-off from the Police Department, (b) provide a liability insurance policy covering property damage or personal injury for at least one million dollars, naming the City of Cambridge as the beneficiary and (c) provide a complete list of rides and games, the names of companies supplying the rides, and a Commonwealth of Massachusetts Inspection Certificate (for mechanical rides only). If these companies have no previous experience working in the City, they must first attend a hearing to obtain permission from the License Commission to operate rides.

Inspectional Services Department

Permits - The Inspectional Services Department (ISD) issues food handlers permits, tent permits, and wiring permits. ISD will advise the applicant should any of these permits apply to the special event. To ensure public safety at indoor events, ISD may require that the building be inspected if the special event is not part of the building's normal use.

Electrical Department

Additional Electrical Hook-Ups - Once the essential electrical needs for the event have been identified by the applicant and/or certified electrical consultants, the City's Electrical Department will determine if sufficient power is available or can be installed at the site to meet the need. If installation is required, the applicant will bear the costs of installing and removing all equipment, staff time, and energy used. The Electrical Department may request that the applicant provide a certified private contractor to complete installation and hook-ups.

Police Department

Police Details, Motorcycle Escorts, Use of Auxiliary Police - The nature and cost of police services to the applicant are determined by the duration and size of the event. The Police Department will assist in coordinating the use of Auxiliary Police where possible or appropriate.

Fire Department

Ambulance Service - Emergency medical technicians can be retained through the Fire Department at the going detail rate.

Fire Lanes - Fire lanes shall be a minimum of twelve feet wide and be maintained for emergency vehicle use, even if the street is blocked for the event.

Disabilities Commission

The Americans with Disabilities Act and/or the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board has set guidelines pertaining to accessibility, such as the provision of auxiliary aids and services to facilitate communication.

The Disabilities Commission has prepared an access checklist which will be provided to the event applicant at the initial meeting.

Other Items

The applicant must contact all abutting property owners, including churches, to inform them of the upcoming event. Special consideration should be given to timing events so as not to interfere with religious services. The applicant should notify DPW once this requirement has been met.

The City of Cambridge does not allow games of chance and gambling within its jurisdiction.

The applicant may want to designate an area for lost persons.

How can the City be notified of an event cancellation?

In case of cancellation, the applicant must notify the City immediately by calling the Department of Public Works at (617) 349-4860. Cancellation calls must be received no later than 6:00 AM the day of the event or at least three (3) hours before the event is scheduled to start.

Does the special events permitting process apply to events held on private property?

No. However, a one-day entertainment, peddler/vendor and/or liquor license may be needed, and the steps to obtain this license vary slightly depending on whether the event location is on college premises. For specific information or to obtain this license, contact the License Commission.

If food peddlers using propane tanks are to participate in a special event, what requirements must they meet?

A food peddler must meet the following criteria to obtain a permit to use propane tanks at any event in Cambridge:

- A maximum of 42 pounds of propane is allowed.
- All tanks must have quick fit disconnection (QD). No screw-on hoses are allowed.
- A fire extinguisher must be on site.
- Each mobile or trailer vehicle must meet federal installation standards for propane plumbing (Department of Transportation and National Fire Prevention Association 58).
- All food peddlers should make every effort to pre-cook all food prior to attending the event to reduce the use of propane.
- The event holder should advise all food peddlers to be in place two hours before the event in order to obtain a proper inspection from a Fire Department inspector and an ISD gas inspector. Any peddler failing the inspection will be asked to leave the event. The peddler may return with a new unit only if the inspector is on site within the detail hours assigned and can inspect the unit.
- The event holder is responsible for ensuring that events with 7 to 30 propane food peddlers have a Fire Department detail and an

ISD gas inspector detail for a minimum of four hours. If the event has 6 or less propane food peddlers, a courtesy inspection by the Fire Department and an ISD gas inspector will be performed.

- The Fire Department will provide the applicant with a check list to be distributed to each of the vendors.

Who can I contact for more information on special events permits and licenses?

For General Information:

City Manager's Office - Hours: 8:30AM-5:00PM,
City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue, 1st Floor. Diane Squires,
Phone (617) 349-4300, Fax (617) 349-4307, TTY (617) 349-4242

For Specific Information:

Disabilities Commission - Hours: 8:30AM-5:00PM, Coffon
Building, 51 Inman Street, 2nd Floor. Mike Muehe,
Phone (617) 349-4692, Fax (617) 349-4766, TTY (617) 492-0235

Electrical Department - Hours: 8:30AM-5:00PM,
100 Smith Place (temporary). Stephen Lenkauskas,
Phone (617) 349-4925, Fax (617) 349-4913, TTY (617) 349-4805.

Fire Department - Hours: 8:00AM-4:30PM,
491 Broadway. Lieutenant Barry Lynde,
Phone (617) 349-4918, Fax (617) 349-4912, TTY (617) 499-9924.

Inspectional Services Department - Hours: 8:00AM-5:00PM,
Lombardi Building, 831 Mass Ave., 1st Floor. Department Clerk,
Phone (617) 349-6100, Fax (617) 349-6132, TTY (617) 349-6112.

License Commission - Hours 8:30AM-5:00PM,
Lombardi Building, 831 Mass Ave., 1st Floor. Valerie Harris,
Phone (617) 349-6140, Fax (617) 349-6148, TTY (617) 349-6112.

Police Department Headquarters - Hours: 8:30AM-5:00PM,
5 Western Avenue. Captain Richard Bongiorno,
Phone (617) 349-3214, Fax (617) 349-3320, TTY (617) 499-9924.

Public Works Department - Hours 8:30AM-5:00PM,
147 Hampshire Street. Lenore Lawrence,
Phone (617) 349-4833, Fax (617) 349-4814, TTY (617) 349-4805.

Traffic, Parking & Transportation - Hours: 8:30AM-5:00PM,
City Hall Annex, 57 Inman Street, 1st Floor. Dave Bryant,
Phone (617) 349-4715, Fax (617) 349-4747, TTY (617) 349-4621.

Metropolitan District Commission - Hours: 8:00AM-5:00PM,
Recreation Office, 20 Somerset St., Boston. Cathy Winter/
Laurie Shannon,
Phone (617) 727-9547, Fax (617) 727-6057.

City Manager

Robert W. Healy

Deputy City Manager

Richard C. Rossi

City Council

Mayor Francis Duehay

Councillor Anthony Galluccio, Vice Mayor

Councillor Kathleen Born

Councillor Henrietta Davis

Councillor Kenneth E. Reeves

Councillor Sheila Russell

Councillor Michael Sullivan

Councillor Timothy Toomey, Jr.

Councillor Katherine Triantafillou

The Community Development Department of the City of Cambridge has prepared a Guide to City Offices and Permitting containing a city-wide map of all permit issuing agencies, their contact information, and a comprehensive listing of permits issued by various City departments. If you would like to receive a copy, please call (617) 349-4600. Other permit brochure titles currently available by dialing the same number include:

- Step-by-Step Guide to Curb Cuts
- Step-by-Step Guide to Building Permits
- Step-by-Step Guide to Fire Safety
- Step-by-Step Guide to Obtaining Historical Commission Certificates and Neighborhood Conservation District Commission Certificates
- Step-by-Step Guide to Starting a Business in Cambridge

The City of Cambridge does not discriminate on the basis of disability. The City will provide auxiliary aids and services, written materials in alternative formats, and reasonable modifications in policies and procedures to persons with disabilities upon request.

The information contained in this document may not be complete or fully up to date and is subject to change. To confirm information regarding a permitting process, contact the appropriate City of Cambridge department(s). This document should be used strictly for informational purposes. All other uses require the written permission of the City of Cambridge.

